

PRESS RELEASE



Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

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September 11, 2006

Strategy To Restore & Protect The Great Lakes To Be Focus Of Congressional Hearing

Washington, D.C. – The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy and how it is serving as a framework for restoring and protecting the Great Lakes will be the topic of a Congressional hearing on Wednesday.

The hearing by the **U.S. House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment**, chaired by **U.S. Rep. John J. Duncan, Jr. (R-TN)**, is scheduled to begin at **2 p.m. on Wednesday, September 13th in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building**. A live webcast of the hearing will be available at the Committee's website:

www.house.gov/transportation

Wednesday's Witness List

- **Honorable Gary Becker**, Mayor, City of Racine, Wisconsin; Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
- **Honorable Benjamin H. Grumbles**, Assistant Administrator for Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- **Brigadier General Bruce A. Berwick**, Commander, Great Lakes and Ohio River Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- **Charles Wooley**, Deputy Regional Director, Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior
- **Todd Ambs**, Water Division Administrator, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Council of Great Lakes Governors
- **Dr. Donald Scavia**, Professor and Associate Dean, School of Natural Resources & Environment, University of Michigan; Director, Michigan Sea Grant

Background Information

The Great Lakes Basin, which includes part or all of eight states and Ontario, Canada, contains over 33 million people, representing one-tenth of the U.S. population and one-quarter of the Canadian population. The Great Lakes constitute the largest system of fresh surface water on Earth, holding 18 percent of the world's fresh water supply and 95 percent of the U.S. fresh water supply.

The Great Lakes Basin supports a substantial amount of industrial and agricultural activity, provides convenient waterways for the movement of goods, is the source of drinking water for millions, is used to generate hydroelectric power, and provides significant recreational benefits.

Industrialization and development have had a significant impact on the Great Lakes ecosystem. The Great Lakes are particularly vulnerable to contamination because outflow rates from most of the Lakes are very slow. Lake Superior, for example, retains water for 173 years. As a result, many pollutants discharged into the Great Lakes settle into the sediments at the bottom of the Lakes.

In addition, non-indigenous species and excessive nutrients have greatly impacted the Great Lakes ecosystem. A new invasive species is discovered every eight months in the Great Lakes. In the 1960s, excessive growth of algae in the Lakes led to a decline in oxygen levels and excessive phosphorus loadings were identified as the cause of this problem. While efforts have been made to address these problems, they remain serious concerns.

The EPA's 2005 National Coastal Condition Report II rated the overall condition of the Great Lakes as "fair-to-poor." Water clarity, drinking water quality, and dissolved oxygen were rated as "fair-to-good" or "good." Sediment contamination had a "poor" rating.

Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy

On May 18, 2004, President Bush signed an Executive Order creating the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force (ITF). The Task Force, under the lead of EPA, brings together 10 agency and Cabinet officers to provide strategic direction on Federal Great Lakes policy, priorities, and programs for restoring the Great Lakes. At the same time, the President instructed EPA to engage the Council of Great Lakes Governors and the Great Lakes Cities Initiative to convene a complementary process of regional collaboration.

The Executive Order called for the development of outcome-based goals such as cleaner water, sustainable fisheries, and system biodiversity and called on the Task Force to ensure Federal efforts target measurable results. In December 2004, the Federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, the Council of Great Lakes Governors, the Great Lakes Cities Initiative, Great Lakes tribes and the Great Lakes Congressional Task Force moved to convene a group now known as the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC). The Collaboration includes the ITF, the Great Lakes states, local communities, tribes, non-governmental organizations and other interests in the Great Lakes region. The GLRC was formed for the purpose of developing a strategic plan to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

The ITF continues to guide and coordinate involved parties in seeking the optimal solution for the Great Lakes restoration and was involved in the GLRC's strategy recommendations. The ITF seeks to coordinate and streamline the restoration process where programs overlap and inefficiencies are found.

The GLRC formed eight Strategy Teams, each focusing on a different issue related to Great Lakes restoration. The critical recommendations of these teams became the GLRC Strategy that was released in December 2005. The Strategy makes recommendations covering eight areas. A copy of the GLRC Strategy can be found at <http://www.glrc.us>.

The GLRC reported in the Strategy that some of the recommendations can be implemented promptly without additional funding while others would require substantial increases in expenditures over many years at federal, state, and local levels.

Many of the participants in the GLRC are poised to begin implementing the collaboration strategy. The hearing will allow witnesses an opportunity to discuss the strategy and its implementation.

**For additional information, access the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee website at:
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